

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is responsible for managing U.S. marine fish resources. Of particular interest are the Atlantic highly migratory species (tunas, billfish, swordfish, sharks) caught in offshore waters. NMFS closely monitors fishing effort and catch of these highly migratory species as these species support economically important recreational and commercial fisheries. Information collected about the fisheries for these species is used to adjust management measures as needed to sustain the fish stocks and the fisheries that depend on them. The authority and regulations pertaining to the collection of data for Atlantic highly migratory species fisheries are attached.

Accurate information is vital to NMFS' efforts to manage highly migratory species. One of the methods NMFS uses to collect information on catch rates and effort is the Large Pelagics Survey (LPS). The LPS dockside interviewers collect catch information from boat captains upon their return from offshore fishing trips. Effort information (trips per week) is collected in a telephone survey of permit holders. In order to efficiently conduct the dockside survey, NMFS has contracted with QuanTech to conduct the interviews. Staff from QuanTech will interview boat captains or the captain's designee (i.e., mate) who have just returned from an offshore oceanic fishing trip which targeted or caught large pelagic species such as tunas, billfish, sharks, and other similar species. The captains (or designees) will be asked a series of questions about their catch and by-catch for the trip just completed, and their catch will be counted. Some interviewers may measure fish lengths or take tissue samples (e.g., hearts, otoliths, vertebrae).

The collection of catch information for Atlantic highly migratory species fulfills U.S. obligations to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas and provides the basis for stock assessments and management of these valuable species in U.S. territorial waters and international waters. The authority for NMFS to collect information from recreational and commercial fishermen comes from the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act. Under this authority, boat captains returning from offshore fishing trips and permitted vessel owners are required to provide catch and effort information to NMFS. Responses to survey questions are classified as confidential and are maintained by NMFS consistent with the confidential fisheries statistics provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and NOAA Administrative Order 216-100. Once collected, data may be released only in accordance with the Privacy Act.

For more information about the LPS and the activities of the QuanTech interviewers, please call, write, or fax:

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NMFS greatly appreciates the cooperation of offshore anglers in providing important management information by participating in the LPS dockside survey.

Sincerely,

Margo Schulze-Haugen, Acting Chief  
Highly Migratory Species Management Division